

R.T. Kendall: Why God's Opinion Must Matter to You

Probably the most neglected teaching of Jesus is what He has to say about hell and eternal punishment. But the most underestimated *feeling* of Jesus is His attitude toward sin today. Equally overlooked is His present opinion of what is going on in His church.

In this generation of "What's in it for me?" we tend to see Jesus as we want Him to be—kind, loving, gentle, humble, meek, fully human and lowly—mirroring the Father's tenderness. Yes, you can be sure He is all these things. But He is equally impartial, fearless, fully aware, observant, changeless, fully God and mirrors the Father's wrath.

This surprises some people. It shouldn't. The same Jesus who chased the money changers out of the temple with a whip—showing His anger toward abuse of worship (John 2:13-16; Mark 11:15-17)—is the one John saw on the Isle of Patmos who had eyes like "blazing fire" and feet like "bronze glowing in a furnace" (Rev. 1:14-15). Jesus Christ is the same "yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Also often forgotten are the words of this same Jesus from the right hand of God to the seven churches in Asia (see Rev. 2:5, 16, 22; 3:1-3, 16).

These observations of Jesus show us how aware He is of what is going on in His church on the earth. He knows everything. The book of Revelation, among other things, unveils how Jesus *feels* about what is going on in His church,

Do not forget also the way in which our Lord Jesus Christ revealed His total awareness, sympathy and approval of what was going on in parts of His church. These words also show not only that Jesus knows everything, but also that He is aware of our faithfulness (see Rev. 2:2-3, 9-10, 13, 19; Rev. 3:4.

3:8-11, 19).

I wonder how many times I have seen people whom I admired but never connected with a vision of Jesus in order to know God's opinion of them. Countless people, of course, thousands, tens of thousands, maybe even millions. If God were pleased to do so, He would let me discern His opinion of every person I run into! I suppose some prophetic people have this gift. God has mercifully chosen not to let me have visions like this in over 60 years.

But the truth is He has an *opinion* of every single person I meet. Every person I see at a distance, shake hands with or get close to. Yes, God has an opinion of every one of them. It is possible that I have had many friends whom Jesus' face would reveal disapproval of. It is also possible I have enemies who would have His approval. It is surely good that He has not let me see His opinion. It would give me information I could probably not cope with. But the fact remains, God does have an opinion about every person. What is more, what matters is not how people are regarded by us here on earth but how they are regarded by God in heaven.

Here is the most disquieting news of all. One day, God will reveal His opinion of every single one of us. "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart" (1 Cor. 4:5b, NIV).

The word "praise" or "honor" in John 5:44 comes from the Greek word *doxa*—from which we get the doxology: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." The root word for *doxa* means "opinion." That gets to the heart of the meaning: *God's glory is His opinion*. If we want the honor of God, we must esteem His opinion more than the praise of people.

✘ Adapted from *Popular in Heaven, Famous in Hell* by R. T. Kendall, copyright 2018, published by Charisma House. This book is a must-have if you want to learn how to honor God and

be popular in heaven, famous in hell for thwarting the enemy's purposes. To order your copy, [click on this link](#).

Prayer Power for the Week of July 21, 2019

This week, continue to pursue God, surrender everything to Him and determine to bring Him the honor and glory due His name. Continue to pray for revival in our churches that would overflow to the nation and the world. Pray for our president and those working with him to ensure peace, freedom and prosperity in our country. Remember our allies, and continue to pray for those serving our nation as first responders and military personnel. Read: 2 Chronicles 7:14.

For Weight-Loss Success, Here's What You Need Most

Why can't I do what I am telling myself I want to do? It happens with everything from losing weight to getting a degree to saving money to doing the laundry.

Here's the hard truth, it's because you do not have intentional focus. In other words, you don't really want it if it means you may have to change something you're doing now to get it.

Doesn't Happen by Chance

"Intentional" means "to do something deliberately or on purpose." It's not something that happens by chance. It is calculated, conscious, willful, preconceived, predetermined, premeditate, prearranged, thought out in advance.

Now pair that with the word "focus," which essentially means

“the center of attention, focal point, kingpin or bedrock.”

To intentionally focus on something means that one thing is the calculated, well thought out, deliberate center of our attention. For us to do what we are telling ourselves to do, it must be something we don't just want, but that we are fixated on.

Motivation Is Key

I see so many people who make decisions such as deciding to lose weight, but they have no motivation for the work it will take to do what they think they want to do. They want to do it as long as it is easy or someone else is telling them exactly what to do.

When they find out it is going to take them more work than just following a specific menu for a few months, they no longer want in. They were never motivated for the type of time investment it takes to change habits that have taken a lifetime to develop.

Motivation, then, becomes a major key for losing weight. Intentional focus will not happen unless we are motivated. This means we have to have a really big reason for wanting to lose weight.

What Motivates You?

I've found those who just want to lose weight to look better set motivation quickly aside when faced with that big piece of their favorite dessert. They want to look better in order to feel better, but at the moment, they think they will feel better if they can eat that piece of cake.

Of course, they have free will and can do that, but for many, especially those who suffer with sugar addiction, binge eating or overeating syndromes, they cannot just stop with one piece.

As I've said before, for me, one is too many, and 10,000 is

never enough. I simply have to abstain from foods made with flour and sugar. They taste too good to me, and then I need more, and my addiction has been triggered.

Abstinence Brings Peace

To live in peace with myself and keep my addiction at bay, I choose not to start in the first place. It's been over six years since I've had a traditional dessert. I simply abstain from processed sugar and pretty much all sugars, except fruit.

Today I no longer crave the rich, decadent desserts. I don't even have a desire for them. Just thinking about eating something like that makes me sick. This is a huge change from where I was for most of my adult life. I lived to eat those things.

Instead, I eat strawberries, apples, oranges, peaches and other fruits. Sometimes I will make gluten-free desserts with bananas and Stevia, but none of them are sickeningly sweet. They just have a slight sweet taste.

Motivation for Change

My motivation for the change was simple. I didn't want to cause myself to die sooner because of my poor food choices. It would have been extremely selfish of me to continue to stuff myself with the types of death-giving foods when I could actually have a chance of living longer if I abstained.

I would have taken myself from my family before my time. I didn't want that to happen. The major motivation for me, then, was to live.

I wanted to be present for my children and hopefully one day meet future grandchildren. I wanted to fulfill the destiny God has on my life. I wanted to write books. I wanted to be whom I knew God called me to be.

God's Desire

More than anything I knew that God wanted to change me. I didn't know at the time that God wanted to take me on a total transformation journey—body, soul and spirit. Romans 12:2 (MSG) sums up the process. "Fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

To be honest, I thought I only needed to change the outside of me. Oh, how wrong I was. The transformation has touched every single part of me. I've changed mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

All of that occurred at the same time as I was working on changing physically by losing over 250 pounds, but it all happened because I was allowing God to transform me rather than me trying to make it happen.

My Secret Truth

During the journey, I encountered many obstacles that in the past would have simply stopped me in my tracks. This time, though, I was working with a mentor who had been there and a group who also wanted to go forward.

Without the guidance of my mentor, I would have never been successful, and even if I had lost the weight by now, I would have gained every ounce back plus more. That is a truth I've never voiced before. However, I know it to be true with every fiber of my being because it was my *modus operandi* up until then.

My mentor is my life insurance. He speaks truth into my life and challenges me at that deep core level where motivation meets intention. The same will be true for the mentor you choose. And to be successful, you do need a mentor.

I'm looking toward my future with intentional focus. My main motivation is to live a better life tomorrow than I have lived today.

I have goals for the next five years and the next. I'm not stopping. I'm intentionally focused.

What about you? What are your goals? What is your motivation? Who will be your mentor? {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of five books and two study guides, including her latest, [Sweet Journey to Transformation: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Live Healthy](#), and her No. 1 best-seller, [Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds](#). She is also a blogger, spiritual weight loss coach (check out her coaching group, [Overcomers Academy](#)) and speaker at [TeresaShieldsParker.com](#).

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Use These Words to Win Your Spiritual Battles

Have you ever heard someone pray for something, then go right out and start saying exactly the opposite of what they prayed for? I have.

For example, I've heard someone ask God for direction in life, then heard them say: "I can't hear from God—He's not talking to me. I have no idea what to do. It's so hard to know God's will." Or maybe they're praying for their child, and right after they pray, they say, "I don't know what I'm going to do with that kid. ..."

That's just undoing everything they prayed for! They believe more in what's happening (or not happening) around them than in God's promises, and they're undoing their prayer by what

they're saying with their mouths. What should they be doing instead? They should be speaking power words!

Power words are words that agree with God—words that release our faith in agreement with the promises in the Bible, no matter what we feel or see all around us. Our words matter! God created the world with words, and He's given us that same creative power in *our* words. So we need to be sure we're using our power for good and speaking words that agree with God.

When you've prayed and asked God for something, don't negate your prayer by speaking words of doubt and confusion about the situation. Instead, release your faith in what God has promised by using power words over your life and the lives of those you're praying for.

Agree With the Bible

Simply put, power words agree with God's Word. Romans 4:17b says we are to use our faith like God does and "call those things that do not exist as though they did." Say what you want (according to the Bible), not what you have.

For example, say you've prayed for healing, and now you're believing that by Jesus' stripes you are healed according to 1 Peter 2:24. You may have symptoms and pain, but instead of saying, "I have symptoms and pain," power words would say, "It doesn't matter what I see or feel, by His stripes, I am healed!"

Hebrews 4:12 says God's word is "alive"—it's as sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through every problem. The Bible is what separates the truth from untruth. We don't want to see the good news in the Bible, pray and ask God to bring it to pass in our lives, then go out and say exactly the opposite of what we just asked for.

That's easy to do if the situation looks bad or the circumstances look the opposite of what we prayed for, but

that's not what faith is. Faith is believing what God has said no matter what we see or feel. *That* is the fight of faith, and we release our faith by the words we speak.

Remember, there is creative power in your words. Mark 11:23 says, " For truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says."

That's amazing, isn't it? You will have whatever you've been saying! So take a good, hard look at what you've been saying and make sure you're using power words by saying what God says. Keep *your* words in agreement with *His* Word, and you'll see the power of faith work for you. {eoa}

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Here's How to Prioritize Your End-Times Preparation

Having spent many years in the South and on the East Coast, I've lived through snowstorms, blizzards, sleet, tornadoes, hurricanes and floods. I've been through power outages, freezing temperatures and sweltering, humid heat. We could fry an egg on New York's sidewalk in August or sit on a porch in Mississippi sipping ice water in amazement that the trees,

beautiful as they were, looked like a still life painting. Not a leaf moved. And nobody, but nobody, joined us outside at midday. If the heat didn't get you, the humidity did. That was true in Florida too.

We are fairly new residents to the southern West Coast now. Florida did not have mountains, so it's quite a treat to see Southern California's majestic snow-capped mountains each morning from my patio. Florida's warm breezes can't compare to the 112-degree weather we experience in our valley in mid-July. My feet feel the burn in seconds.

But last week was a first for me. There were no tornado warnings, hurricane tracking or flash thunderstorms. I awoke feeling that my bed was being lifted, and my head was spinning. My balance was off; I was light-headed and experienced vertigo for the first time. It only lasted a few seconds, but it was memorable. I'll never forget it. Later that day, I was with my husband, and the blinds in our bedroom were swinging back and forth as though we were at sea.

When I turned on the television, I saw meteorologists reporting the 6.4 earthquake and predicting more aftershocks. The aftershocks came, but we were now expecting them. What struck me about the reports was the ticker tape at the bottom of the screen that read: "COPS [Citizens' Options for Public Safety]: Only call 9-1-1 in case of emergency." My first thought was, "If a 6.4 earthquake is not an emergency, what is?" Of course, I knew what they meant. We were in crisis, but some were in greater need than others. Don't call unless you are hurt or are in immediate danger, such as experiencing a fire, trapped somewhere or suffering from wounds.

Several days later, a 7.4 earthquake hit in the same area, but that was not the "big one." The "big one" has been predicted for years. How do we prepare for the "big one?" It will hit suddenly. It will throw you off guard, but it will come. Experts say we are long overdue. They are telling us to

prepare.

s I've learned through the experiences of my life that the only "safe" place is in the perfect will of God. I've faced danger on many occasions, but God has kept my loved ones and me safe and secure. This doesn't mean we don't have to be prepared. It simply means that we prioritize our preparation.

Our first priority is our spiritual preparation. Let's make sure we are prepared to meet our Lord. Let's keep our heart right before Him and our spiritual accounts up to date. Then prepare for our emergency needs: flashlights, water, non-perishable foods, blankets and so forth. Follow the instructions of your community leaders and first responders. If you are able, be ready to offer assistance when needed.

We are in the last days and we need to heed our Lord's admonition to be prepared. (See Matt. 24:36-42; Matt. 25:1-13). We may not know what will happen from one day to the next, but He does and we can rely on Him.

My peace and my strength are in the Lord (Ps. 23). He is my strong tower, and the author and finisher of my faith. Whether there be storms or the unexpected, I am secure in Him. I trust you are as well.

Prayer Power for the Week of July 14, 2019

This week, thank the Lord that He is your safety net. Pray for those who have been victimized by natural disasters and for those responding to their need. Continue to pray for our nation, its leaders, allies, military and their families. Pray that they would have godly wisdom and wise counsel. Pray for the healing of our nation. Read: 2 Chronicles 7:14.

10 War Room Verses for When You Feel Discouraged

Have you ever felt the frustration of giving everything you have to something, only to feel like you have a 10-ton anchor strapped to you, keeping you from getting ahead ...

while at the same time watching someone else race to the finish line without even trying very hard?

We've all been there.

And the frustration is compounded when we see someone race to the finish line while cheating at the game of life!

Life is often not fair and often leads us feeling discouraged.

This week in our Good Morning Girls' study, we discover that we're not alone in this discouragement and frustration.

In Psalm 73, the writer (who could have been Asaph or one of the writers in the school of Asaph) describes a time in his life when he was frustrated by the unfairness of life.

He saw that:

- They didn't have a painful death.
- They were strong and healthy.
- They had an easy life.
- They were arrogant and got away with it.
- They seemed to get away with injustice, too.
- They were rich.
- They were rude and abrasive.

They basically lived perverse and ungodly lives and still had it easy!

It just seemed so unfair, because here the writer is living a godly life and doing all of the things that please God and

doesn't have it nearly as easy as these ungodly people do.

Sound familiar?

And he dares to say what a lot of us think:

"Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?" (Ps. 73:13, NLT).

If we're all honest, we will admit that we've thought this a time or two in life.

"Really, God? Because I read my Bible, pray, go to church and love my neighbor and that person over there has broken 11 of your 10 Commandments and look at them!"

But then this happens: "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (Ps. 73:17)

Whenever we're discouraged, all we need to do is look to God; open His Word; go to Him in prayer and suddenly our perspective changes.

The writer of Psalm 73 was looking at the ungodly people around him with an earthly perspective.

His concept of success was defined by this world and all that could be obtained in this lifetime. But when he went entered God's presence, his eyes were opened to see another definition of success.

10 War Room Verses for When You Feel Discouraged

Here's a definition of success that goes beyond this lifetime, that is defined by Almighty God

He says, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had almost lipped. For I was envious at the boastful; I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2-3).

Suddenly, success in this life looked one-dimensional, flimsy,

plastic, fake. Because once this life is over and we're put in the ground, our success rots with our earthly temple.

God isn't impressed by:

- Whether we live on the affluent side of town.
- Have the newest iPhone.
- Drive a Lexus.
- Live in a big home.
- Wear the latest fashion.
- Have our kids enrolled in an Ivy League school.
- Sit in a corner office.
- Have letters after our name.

These things do not impress Him at all. What impresses Him is if our name is written in the book of life and if we're taking people with us when we go.

What impresses Him is our willingness to sacrifice all we have and all we are to live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

What impresses Him is our complete preoccupation with His glory to the degree that we are not at all concerned for our own reputation.

What impresses Him is our willingness to allow Him to so fill us with His love that we are able to give love and grace to those around us—even when they hurt and offend us.

Just so the world around us feels the love of Jesus, sees His glory shining through us, and sees us living lives that are radically different from anything they've ever seen before.

So that they are intrigued enough to ask us, "What is different about you?"

That is what impresses God.

And that is what this writer saw when He entered the sanctuary.

He said, "I was a brute and did not understand; I was as a beast before You" (Ps. 73:22).

He's literally saying, "I entered God's presence, and suddenly, I felt like a complete idiot! Duh! Success in this life isn't what it's all about! It's about success on heavenly terms. It's about being rich by an eternal economy!"

"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:25-26).

So, when you feel discouraged and defeated, frustrated and envious of other people's success that you wish you could enjoy, do as the writer of Psalm 73 did.

Enter God's presence; open your Bible, go to prayer and allow God to give you a heavenly perspective. You can start with these 10 Bible verses for when you feel discouraged.

1. Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths."

2. 2 Corinthians 12:9

"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

3. Psalm 32:8

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye on you."

4. Philippians 4:13

"I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me."

5. Isaiah 26:3

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."

6. James 1:5

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and without criticism, and it will be given to him."

7. Galatians 6:9

"And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up."

8. Philippians 4:6-7

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

9. 1 Thessalonians 5:24

"Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it."

10. Psalm 121:1

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come?"

Get these verses on prayer cards with space to write your prayers to the Lord underneath! {eoa}

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evening. She holds an associate degree in practical theology and is passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author [a number of books](#). She is the author of "[A Little R & R](#)," where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at [these other places](#) on a regular basis. You may follow her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#).

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The Hidden Blessings God Brings Through Your Pain

More than any other time in the history of this country we are focused on building our own kingdoms rather than God's kingdom. We see it everywhere we look in politics, business, television, movies, social media, even in our churches.

We are focused on being the best, on reaching our pinnacles of success and are convinced that God is the one who will get us there.

I Am Ashamed

I hesitate to talk about this lest you think I'm pointing fingers at you. If it applies to you then I am, but I also have a lot more fingers pointed back at me.

I am ashamed of my prayer life. I am ashamed that the things I pray about all seem to focus on what I think is best for me, my family and my existence in this world.

Even when I pray for others, I pray what I think is best, as if it is all up to me: "Lord, heal them. Lord, prosper them.

Lord, deliver them.” These are all great prayers to pray for sure, but what if we need to learn a lesson that can only be learned through suffering? What is God’s will then?

The Purpose of Testing

Remember Job? God told Satan that Job was “the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil” (Job 1:8, NLT).

Then Satan retorted, “You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!” (Job 1:10b-11).

Satan was essentially saying, “Of course Job loves you, because he has never known a moment of struggle or suffering.” So God gave the devil permission to test Job.

Suffering Brings Greatness

Then every trial and test imaginable was thrown at Job, who already had a kingdom of his own that God Himself had helped him build. Why would God allow Satan to test him rather than bless him more?

“God already knew Job loved Him ... The suffering was allowed to bring Job to a level of greatness,” Timothy Keller writes in *Walking With God through Pain and Suffering*. “We should love God for Himself alone, not for the benefits He brings.”

This is hard for an American Christian to grasp unless he or she has been through a time of hardship and suffering. During a time of testing or difficult circumstances, we may at first be angry with God for the losses we’ve suffered.

I mean if we are obeying Him, then He’s supposed to bless us, right? The problem comes when our definition of blessing doesn’t align with God’s. To God, a lesson learned is one of the greatest blessings He can give us, and some lessons are

only learned by going through the fire.

Grace and Mercy

It's in suffering that we learn about the grace and mercy of God best. Even though we may be angry with Him and not understand why He doesn't step in and save us in the way we'd like to be saved, we are still given the opportunity to move closer to Him.

God knew that Job was a good servant of His, but not the great one he would be when he stopped serving just for the stuff that God gave him. God wanted Job to love Him for who He was, not what Job got as a result of that.

God's goal in allowing Satan to test Job was that Job love God for God alone and nothing else. The only way for Job to learn that was through loss, through suffering.

Walking Out of Hell

I'm going to be gut-level honest here, this scares me spitless. To think about God sifting me and withholding His power, protection and well, the trappings of this life, is really scary.

That I serve at the will of the God of the universe in every single thing I do is foremost on my mind. But just like you, I've built my own little kingdom here on earth. I have a house, cars, furniture, a business and people I love.

I know all of this is given with, by and through God's hand. Still if there is a part of it that He did not help me build, it needs to go ... now. I can't even serve Him without His help and blessings. I am powerless without Him.

I've learned the truth that God and God alone is my strength by going through the sufferings and trials of my life, including gaining a tremendous amount of weight and being on the brink of death.

I've learned that the only way to walk out of any discouraging and overwhelming difficulty is to follow His voice step by step out of that hell and into the abundance of who He is.

My Kingdoms Must Fall

The biggest thing I've learned, though, is I cannot be a builder of my own kingdoms. My wants are selfish no matter what they are. I can justify them as God-centered, but I've learned that unless they come from Him first, unless He breathes on them and fans them into flames, they are still just hay and stubble.

I don't ever want to be someone who has the name of God plastered on an empty vessel with no Holy Ghost fire and power inside. Everything I've done that is of no use in His kingdom I ask that He now burn up completely and leave only the gold, the things that matter.

I lay down any vestige of self-centeredness. I ask forgiveness for always wanting more of You, God, when I already have You poured into every part of me that's available. I only need to empty more of myself in order to have all of You.

I Lay It All Down

I serve at the will of the God of the universe. My goal is to help build whatever section of wall He wants me to construct for His kingdom. My legacy, my history, my testimony can be nothing more or nothing less than that.

Today, God, today, I once again lay down my self, my desires, my will. No matter what, I ask that my kingdoms fall in order for Yours to stand.

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of five books and two study guides, including her latest, [Sweet Journey to Transformation: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Live Healthy](#), and her No. 1 best-seller, [Sweet Grace: How I Lost](#)

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The Warfare Reason You Must Choose Your Words Wisely

Do you say what you have? Or do you say what you need? This is the topic of discussion for today.

Knowing our words have the power of life and death, we need to take what we say very seriously. But most people don't consider what they say and just blurt whatever comes to mind. This thoughtless blurting causes great harm, not only to ourselves, but also to others.

If we continue to say to our spouse, "You never listen to me." Guess what? Eventually, our spouse will stop listening to us. If we say, "God never hears me when I pray," He will not respond to us when we pray. Why? Because our words possess the power of life and death. And this includes relationships as well as the human body. We either speak life or we speak death to those relationships. The correct way to speak to your spouse in this situation is to say something like, "I need to speak with you. It's important. I need you to pay attention and actually hear what I have to say." When it comes to God, thank Him for His loving care and for listening to your prayer.

When dealing with a sick body, the same principle applies. If you continue to say that you are sick, in pain and worn out,

your body will obey your words and produce ill symptoms in your body. Instead you ought to change the way you speak over yourself and say what you have need of is already done, accomplished by faith instead of what you have, or don't have. Romans 4:17 says it this way, "(as it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations') before a God whom he believed, and who raises the dead, and calls those things that do not exist as though they did." This form of speech may sound radical, and it is. It's faith talk. It's how God speaks. He creates the need or desired effect by speaking it into existence. And this is how He expects us to speak, like Him, by faith.

How does this look in real life? Someone receives a medical death report. The tests show that there is a cancerous tumor on the pancreas. They are told it is inoperable. There isn't anything they can do for the individual. They are instructed to go home and put their affairs in order, prepare to die. This report is difficult to hear. But as Christians, how can we respond to such death reports?

If we want to fight to live, we have to get a handle on the power of words being spoken over us and by us. For example, with the above situation: "I am a Christian. I believe in the healing power of Jesus. And I cannot and will not receive this report." And hold your ground, because people who do not know the Word concerning the healing promises of God will not understand your stance. And that's okay. What matters is what you believe. And will you activate your faith and speak words that will produce what you have need of, instead of what you presently have.

How do you do this? Start by using the power of death in your words and curse the cancer and that deadly tumor it has produced in your body. And then use the power of life on your tongue and speak words that produce life, healing and strength in the name of Jesus. If you will hold up your shield of faith and speak as God does into the matter, your healing will

manifest. {eoa}

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The example given above is a true story, and the person involved did as instructed and received a manifestation of healing by using the power of life and death in their words. They spoke the desired result—healing—into existence.

When Times Get Tough, Tough People Depend on Prayer

Once again, it's late. The thickness of night has settled over the city as many rest. Given the hour, everyone in the room should also be sleeping in their own homes, preparing for the day ahead. But desperate moments often result in the loss of sleep.

Another day has passed, and tension has only increased. First it was James, and now it's Peter. King Herod's intentions are clear.

The stillness of the night stands in evident contrast to the flurry within the confines of a room of friends, asking for the impossible, needing the miraculous. The quiet of the sleepy town is breached by desperate requests that must be met by the power of God and can only be stewarded through heartfelt intercession.

Cries arise within the room. A man's life hangs in the balance. At times like these, only the Lord can step in and bring deliverance. Did fresh tears disturb and stain a dusty floor? Did knees and resolve harden against the whispers of impossibility?

We may not know all the details, but the most significant events have been recorded for us.

About that time King Herod extended his hands to harm certain ones from the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword. Seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to arrest Peter also. This happened during the Days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him before the people after the Passover (Acts 12:1-4).

We know that despite the way things appeared, the church displayed the resolve of the children of God to know that there's power in prayer.

So Peter was kept in prison. But the church prayed to God without ceasing for him.

The very night when Herod would have brought him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. And the guards before the door were securing the prison. And suddenly an angel of the Lord approached him, and a light shone in the prison. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Rise up, quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

Then the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put your sandals on." And he did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." He went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had

passed the first and the second guards, they came to the iron gate leading to the city, which opened to them by itself. And they went out and went forward one street. And immediately the angel left him.

When Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I certainly know that the Lord has sent His angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

Realizing this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

In the flurry of supplication and audible groans comes the response to a single desire of a unified cry.

As Peter knocked at the door of the porch, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, from joy she did not open the door, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the door.

They said to her, "You are insane." But she insisted that it was really so. So they said, "It is his angel."

But Peter continued knocking. And when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Motioning to them with his hand to be quiet, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place (Acts 12:13-17).

Like many believers who came before and many who would follow afterward, this group exemplified the resolve of the church to pray for the miraculous. Thousands of years later much remains the same.

In the midst of persecution and death sentences, we pray. In

the face of chaos and lack, we ask. In the fervor of turmoil, we still seek.

This is the church—not an elite few with the gift of prayer, but believers who turn their face to trust and follow their God. Generations have come and gone, but the cry of intercession continues because God is still needed.

With humble hearts, well-worn Scriptures and faith, we remember the stories of old and denounce the taunts of the enemy. Our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He will come through.

But at times, the answers we desire don't seem to come as quickly as the word from Rhoda. The need is there. We even have ideas as to how God can answer our impossible situations, now that we've exhausted our attempts as to how we can answer our own prayers. We offer our tear-drenched words with the hope of seeing a response. In the silence, between prayers asked and answers received, we are reminded of the truth: Our God is the God who answers prayers.

Even when our prayers seem to go unanswered, we still pray without ceasing, expecting the miraculous. Like Elijah, we respond to what we heard. We pray again, looking for the answer that has been promised. Like Daniel, we return to the Lord, knowing His word does not return to Him void. He fulfills all He has promised and is the only one who swears by Himself.

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He spoken, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num. 23:19).

But in times of waiting, unseen answers can provide that more opportune time for the enemy to attempt to discourage believers. These carefully selected moments provide the door that fear seems intent to pry open with any lie that might

work, seeding doubt in the field of promise. Will God answer this time? What if His answer is too late? What if it doesn't happen?

In times such as these, it's important to remember that prayer may feel like simple words. But even when simple words are mingled with faith and spoken to the Ancient of Days, the reaction is not only powerful but is eternal. Our prayers connect with the plan of God, that His desires may be advanced in our day and time. And His plans and purposes always prevail. "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless, counsel of the Lord will stand" (Prov. 19:21).

Despite how things may look, despite the events the enemy would bring to mind that didn't turn out the way we prayed or expected, we continue to pray and believe. In that place, we're reminded that He watches over His word to perform it. He cannot lie. He is God, and He is always working.

Even when we see nothing, we remember what He's done. He heard the prayers of the Israelites in bondage, and He freed them. He heard the prayers of Hannah in her barrenness, and He healed her. He heard the cries of the church for the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, and He delivered him.

We hold tightly to the Word and follow the example not only set by the early church but also by our elder brother who has not stopped praying that His Father's plan would be accomplished: "But He, because He lives forever, has an everlasting priesthood. Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He at all times lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24-25).

On earth, Jesus prayed continuously. He saw the need around Him and the contrast to its original design, and sought His Father's plan, healing bodies and minds, setting people free, raising the dead and preaching the gospel of the kingdom that many would be released from the grip of darkness.

But even the Son of God's prayers are still being answered.

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. May they also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory which You gave Me, that they may be one even as We are one: I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in unity, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23).

In heaven, He continues to pray for the ultimate fulfillment of the reality that drove Him to the cross. "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Ps. 2:8).

As nations rage, He continues to seek the Father's desire. He doesn't grow weak, He doesn't grow weary. Instead, Jesus continues to be our example and great high priest, knowing there's coming a day when His prayers will also be answered.

Then the seventh angel sounded, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev/ 11:15).

As we lift our words to God and seek His power, we can be comforted by the truth that even when we see nothing, we can be absolutely confident that God is working to bring about His plan. He is still God, and He still responds to prayer. Our words connect with His promises, and He answers. Every prayer is heard and stewarded by the one who is eternal; and in His hands, they are powerful.

I waited patiently for the Lord, and He turned to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,

out of the miry clay, and set my feet on a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God; many will see it, and fear, and will trust in the Lord (Ps. 40:1-3).

How can you be strengthened to continue praying in difficult times?

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Why ‘Just a Little Sugar’ Hurts You More Than You Think

“If I gave up sugar, I wouldn’t have anything to eat.” As I looked at the woman speaking to me, the truth of what she said was obvious. “Besides, just a little sugar never hurt anyone.” She was blind to what it was doing to her. She wore it on her body like heavy baggage she never wanted to let go of.

I knew exactly where she was coming from. She could have been me in the past. I weighed over 430 pounds for years, and it felt like reworking my entire way of eating would be impossible.

My mindset was like that the big food manufacturers: A

spoonful of sugar makes everything taste better. It's why sugar was Grandma's secret ingredient in almost every recipe. It's why food manufacturers put it in almost everything that is canned or prepackaged.

How Much?

When I finally realized I was a sugar addict, my entire mindset changed. I no longer saw sugar as some innocent thing we are obligated to give our children to make them happy. The scales fell off my eyes and I saw it as a tool that the lying, manipulating enemy of my soul was using to steal, kill and destroy my life, my influence in a dying world and the very destiny assignment He has for me. I also saw that I did not have to be a victim to it. Instead, I could be a victor over it with God's help.

Remember the cute Mary Poppins' song with the line, "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down in the most delightful way?" So, I wondered how many grams in a teaspoon of sugar. There are four grams, but most folks don't stop with one teaspoon and many use tablespoons, which would hold 12.5 grams of granulated sugar.

Wait, though. A cube of sugar is the same as a teaspoon of sugar. So let's load up a tablespoon with sugar cubes. There are at least 10 cubes in that tablespoon. That makes 40 grams of sugar in that one spoonful, more than the recommended daily amount for both men and women!

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), the maximum amount of added sugar a woman should eat in a day is 25 grams or 100 calories and men should only eat 37.5 grams or 150 calories (*Added Sugars*, American Heart Association).

America's per capita consumption of sugar is 94 grams or 358 calories! No wonder two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese. That's almost four times the amount recommended for women.

Prepackaged Foods

When I began my extreme weight loss journey, I became a label-reader, desiring to eat sugar-free and also artificial sweetener-free, except for pure stevia, monkfruit and natural fruit. When I really started looking, it amazed me the amount of packaged foods that have sugar added to them.

Here are some statistics from *Prevention* and others: 10 gummy worms have 43 grams; Milky Way candy bar, 36 grams; grape juice unsweetened, 35 grams; 12 oz. can of soda, 33 grams; blueberry muffin, 15.5 grams; fast food double-cheeseburger on bun, nine grams; plain cake donut, 8 grams; spaghetti sauce, 1/2 cup, 7 grams; 1 T catsup, 4 grams; 1 tablespoon of French dressing, 2.5 grams; 1 cup of canned chicken broth, 1.3 grams.

What Harm Does Sugar Do?

It's important to know how much sugar we consume. It adds because zero nutrients and many added calories. Consuming those extra "fluff" calories, though, will eventually add obesity, heart disease and diabetes to our lives, according to the AHA.

Nancy Appleton, Ph.D., lists 76 ways sugar harms us in "Counting the Many Ways Sugar Harms Your Health." Among some of the most significant ways are that sugar feeds cancer cells and has been connected with the development of cancer of the breast, ovaries, prostate, rectum, pancreas, biliary tract, lung, gallbladder and stomach. In addition, it can cause diseases such as: arthritis, asthma, multiple sclerosis, gallstones, appendicitis, hemorrhoids, varicose veins, osteoporosis, food allergies, eczema, cataracts, nearsightedness, emphysema, tooth decay and gum disease. In addition, sugar intake has been shown to be higher in those with Parkinson's disease.

Appleton agrees with many who say sugar is an addictive substance which can be intoxicating, similar to alcohol. This

sweet substance has been painted as so innocent that we would never want to take it from a baby. Yet, in Appleton's list are the many ways excessive sugar consumption affects children including impairing behavior and cognition. To read the list, go [HERE](#).

We have become dependent on prepackaged everything and, thus, depending on sugar to help us make it through the day. Our lives are moving like whirlwinds. We have no time to cook real food from scratch like our ancestors did. We have allowed quick and easy foods, those laden with sugar and preservatives, to creep into our lives.

We supported the production by purchasing those easy-to-fix meals that taste so good. The food industry has discovered that sugar makes anything taste better. To sell their brand their food has to have more sugar to taste better than the other brand.

The heads of the large food manufacturers read the news, too, and know that sugar is causing all types of diseases, but they still give us what we want. Do we really want obesity, heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer's? Apparently we do.

Give It Up

We want it. We crave it. We will pay anything to get it. It masquerades as something innocent, but it is killing us. Maybe it is killing us slowly, but it doing a very effective job.

When I gained up to 430 pounds and stayed there for years, extreme addiction to sugar was the blame, but so was the fact that I opened the door to that happening. I made the choice to eat the foods I ate.

It doesn't really matter that sugar addiction is one of the most "normal" addictions around, if any addiction is normal. There was only one way for me (and you) to get free. I had to surrender it. I didn't think I could do it and I certainly

couldn't have done it without God's help.

I had to commit to it, want to do it, aspire to rise above my circumstances, apply discipline to make it work, follow a planned way of changing my death-giving food habits, deal with cravings and temptations and add components like exercise, rest, play, relaxation and intentional time with God.

The most important ingredient, though, was to admit to God that I am weak and I need His strength to go forward one day, one hour, one minute at a time.

Set Free By God's Grace

I am and always will be a sugar addict set free by God's grace. There really is no cure to magically remove addiction. There is only a way to get through each day holding tightly to Jesus with both hands. I realize I can never let go because the minute I do is when I begin to slide back into the sugar pit. Life is not happier there. It's mind-numbingly brutal.

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that "when I am weak [in human strength], then I am strong [truly able, truly powerful, truly drawing from God's strength]" (2 Cor. 12:10b, AMP). It works like this. When I admit my weakness for sugar and ask for God's help, He gives me the strength to make it through the moment and make the right choice.

Giving up sugar and gluten is a lifestyle for me. After many years of adhering to this choice, I rarely have cravings. If I do I know how to get through them. I have to always remember that I never want to be captured by a substance again. I finally have found a good use for my stubbornness because I "stubbornly refuse to go back to the bondage of my past" (Gal. 5:1b, TPT).

In this entire process, I've lost over 250 pounds and tons of emotional baggage. I'm finally a whole, healthy, happy woman, but it's all because I found out just a little sugar really

can hurt me.

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of five books and two study guides, including her latest, [Sweet Journey to Transformation: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Live Healthy](#), and her No. 1 best-seller, [Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds](#). She is also a blogger, spiritual weight loss coach (check out her coaching group, [Overcomers Academy](#)) and speaker at [TeresaShieldsParker.com](#).

This article originally appeared at [teresashieldsparker.com](#).

What the Recent SCOTUS Decision Says About How We View the Cross

Happy 243rd birthday, America. You've changed a lot in those 243 years. In some ways for the better. In other ways, not so much. But one of the most significant changes is in how the cross is perceived in our culture.

For centuries, the cross has been an undeniable symbol of Christianity. It represents the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. People who identify as Christians erect crosses on church buildings and in cemeteries. They wear crosses around their neck as jewelry.

So it's not surprising that those hostile to the cross of Jesus Christ want it removed from public places. What is surprising—and sad—is the rationale for the recent Supreme Court decision. And many Christians are cheering the decision without realizing the danger of the underpinning argument.

The American Humanist Association (AHA) had asked the Supreme Court to require removal of a 40-foot tall, concrete cross in Bladensburg, Maryland. The cross was originally a private venture to honor local men who died in World War I. The AHA protested the cross's presence because it is located by a public highway and maintained by a government agency.

The Supreme Court rejected the claim that this was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. But here's the kicker...the court said this cross was essentially [historic, not religious](#).

Justice Alito did say, "The cross is undoubtedly a Christian symbol, but that fact should not blind us to everything else that the Bladensburg cross has come to represent." He added, "The image of a simple white cross developed into a cultural symbol of the conflict. ... The adoption of the cross as the Bladensburg memorial must be seen in that historical context."

They permitted the cross to remain because it was cultural and historical rather than just religious. Let that sink in for a moment.

Judge Alito's decision did note, "Its removal or radical alteration at this date would be seen by many not as a neutral act but as the manifestation of a hostility toward religion."

Well, at least we have that. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm thankful for the supportive court decision. Yet I'm torn because of the apparently diluted meaning of the cross of Christ.

Sadly, this is the culmination of decades of nominal Christians going through the motions of religious activity without any heart change. Wearing cross jewelry because it's fashionable or socially acceptable, yet devoid of association with the substitutionary death of our Redeemer.

Today, many people identify as Christian by default. Because

their parents are Christian. Or because they go to church twice a year, on Christmas and Easter. Or because they're not Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim, yet they still have a general belief in God.

The power of God's Word, His redeeming work through Jesus Christ and His ongoing work in believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit all seem to get lost in the default choice. People check one box because the others don't quite fit. It's no wonder the meaning of the cross is leaning more and more toward a cultural and historical context than a religious one.

Am I glad the Bladensburg cross is allowed to stand? Absolutely. But I'm also sad that it's allowed to stand while being slowly and inexorably stripped of its essential meaning.

When you see or wear a cross, is your understanding of it filtered through a cultural perspective or a biblical one? If it's just cultural, you're missing out on both the central meaning of the cross and the one true God it points to.

What does the cross mean to you? {eoa}

Ava Pennington is a writer, speaker and Bible teacher. She writes for nationally circulated magazines and is published in 32 anthologies, including 25 "Chicken Soup for the Soul" books. She also authored Daily Reflections on the Names of God: A Devotional, endorsed by Kay Arthur. Learn more at avawrites.com.

This article originally appeared at avawrites.com.

Listen to Charisma News' reporting of the Bladensburg cross story in the podcast included with this article!